

# THE POLITICS of Modernism Raymond Williams

INTRODUCTION As a lay reader the introduction is difficult, a case of ploughing through a welter of terms which are okay on occasion and individually but send me to sleep when encountered en masse like here. ~~The~~ The problem in "MODERNISM" over the years for myself, has been the need to have the thing defined almost everytime I am in a situation where it is being used. Raymond Williams was involved in a project for "a possible book" on THE POLITICS OF MODERNISM and it is fine that in the posthumously ~~ed~~ collected essays comprising this book he ~~sets~~ attempts to define the subject

## 1 WHEN WAS MODERNISM?

(GAVE UP)

The term itself has been "retrospective since 1950's" All we can do is be POST MODERNISTS, what about we who have never been able to comprehend the term in any static, meaningful way?

metaphoric  
of the realists  
"control"

"Determining the process" why don't we pull in the great social realists - Gogol Flaubert Dickens in precedence over Proust Kafka Joyce?

p32/3 The "ideology of Modernism" selects and aligns later artists with Freud's "primacy of sub/un conscious" "the denaturalization of language" and the "naïve view of language as mirror or transparent glass"

Author (now) appears in Text!! "Self reflexive text" repudiates external authority  
"The above is the ~~theoretic~~ contours"



Williams saying we only have to look at the names in the "real history" to see the ideologising that goes on. ~~But~~ Although he also agrees that there is something dislocating that does occur in mid 19th century Metropolis — transactional capitals of Art

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"CITY OF STRANGERS" restless emigre or exile — anti-bourgeois "manifestos of post revolutionary formation" "singular narrative raised to level of universal myth" "the lonely writer in shabby room in unknowable city"

This "modernism" divides. In remaining Anti-Bourgeois its idea of art is sanctified beyond money & commerce — or else seen as the liberating vanguard of popular conscience

p34

But with it ~~endorsed by the authorities~~ now so in command it is presumed that there is nothing beyond it. History gets stopped dead. This

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Modernism becomes comfortably integrated into the new international capitalism "the lonely hero takes his place as star of the thriller."

The innovations of Modernism so called are the fixed forms of our present moment. To get free we must search out an alternative tradition of post modernism from the neglected works — an inhuman reworking of the past to a modern FUTURE wherein community can be imagined again."



p44 Williams saying that behind the way MODERNISM is regarded is straight ideology - a right wing ideology we look at modernism in isolation, not seeing its innovations as part of tradition ~~but as~~ ~~not as pure~~

45 for Williams the importance of the fact of so many artists ~~being~~ existing in the city doing what they do - not a negotiation alone. How many major innovators were immigrants? <sup>Williams</sup> point

45 for GOOD QUOTE their concentration of wealth/power/state/academy.

46 Language became means to an end, not a social custom.

47 METROPOLIS must be STRESSED. seeing the imperial and capitalist metropolis as a specific historical form. One level must be challenged: the metropolitan interpretation of its own processes as universals.

48 NOBEL, THE INVENTOR OF DYNAMITE

## THE POLITICS OF THE AVANT GARDE

49 the importance of Strindberg and Nietzsche the association of experimental writer with revolutionary characterised by Strindberg's attacks "hatred of the sexes as fundamental law" "defence of the strong and wise against foolish & small (democrats)" "aggressiveness of women a symptom of regress of race"

50 language of Social Darwinism: into cultural Darwinism Strindberg attributing regress to Christianity and applauds Nietzsche's attack on it.







65 Williams immediately putting the case that the right has appropriated a "selective version of Modernism" a way of ratifying narrower positions and procedures "

66 Strindberg's manifesto on Naturalism taken as such  
for Modernism. Williams good here. \*

"ideological presentation" <sup>\*INTERNAL and SELF PROVING\*</sup> Williams wants to be  
diachronic. MODERNISM (EIGHTIST) begins from BAUDLAIRE

67 \* "conventional delineation of avant garde 1910-1930,"  
\* "the resurrection of the word" — defines literary MODERNISM

68 1917 - HUGO BALL - ~~sound poetry~~ - false analogies

69 "abandoning semantic freight"  
71 Symbolism versus Naturalism inner

71 Symbolism versus Naturalism

inher forms      reflexiveness      sign and reference

→ HUMBOLDT'S "inner life"

inher forms → reflexiveness  
→ HUMBOLDT'S  
"inner life"

sign and reference

POTEBNIA p74  
 "inner life"  
 SURREALISM and "automatic writing"  
 "THE CRY"

"THE CRY"

p66 Conventional view is that MODERNISM begins from Baudelaire and this is very misleading according to WILLIAMS \*

## 66 NEGATIVE CONTRAST



The term cult of failure is used by people who are on the defensive against being thought to have committed one compromise too many, in other words, they are attacking those who by word or action are making them appear to have sold out. And usually this is because they have sold out. The argument is tricky though; it revolves around the idea of the individual and society, whether it is possible to live in your society and yet be so opposed to the workings of it that you try to be outwith it. The artist is definitely a good example. It is possible to be an artist whose art is an attack on the prevalent values of society, and yet find that society wishes to reward you by paying you money or glory or both. I doubt whether it happens a lot but it certainly does happen and has happened to myself although I am aware it can be said that whether or not my work is an attack on the prevalent values of society is a matter of opinion. Some people might view me as a right-wing shite; a liberal middle class wanker; whatever. For the sake of this argument though it does not matter. The crucial point is simply that society will often reward an artist who is attacking it. It is not necessary to go into the motives of society in doing this but they will primarily concern cash. The work of an artist can be bought and sold in the market place; it does not really matter what the subject is, if it can be sold sell it. Occasionally an artist can retain control of what is happening to some extent. Take as an example the award of 'the prize'. I have been awarded a prize on more than one occasion. And the truth is I could have refused the prize, but I haven't. By refusing the prize I would have been steering clear of something I don't regard as one of society's better deals for artists. I am not totally opposed to prizes - obviously - otherwise I wouldn't have accepted them. Sometimes the need for cash is too pressing. But the prize can be refused. An artist can make statements about her/himself in relation to society by that refusal. The hard part starts when an artist who doesn't get offered a prize decries the system that awards them. This is when those who are a part of the system and aren't doing too badly by it will want to use the 'cult of failure' label. They will do all that is possible to make out that those who criticise do so entirely out of envy or malice. It becomes impossible to criticise someone who has 'made it' if you who are the critic <sup>have</sup> not 'made it'.

nb the Labour Party's utter acceptance & pride in taking "reality" as given — NO praxis that reality has to be "what is" what is and what is allowed NO DISTINCTION BETWEEN WHAT IS & WHAT IS ALLOWED their saecers at the left for not accepting what is.



Notes for a Criticism of the production (direction of)

The London version of IN THE NIGHT

ways of seeing the text (sculpture)

not to take from, nor to put in, unless very sure - how if it is structural that one alteration has ramifications throughout the different veins (possibilities)

How come the text seems to exist only as the point of departure

that structural tampering must throw out welter upon welter of nontext as the director seeks to find some internal consistency, like when one lie leads to a world of deceit: it is then when the play is no longer what it is (was); it is no longer an interpretation - it has become a new play, a different play

that it does not become a different play but a shambles of the original, inconsistent; a stridency; too physical - the attempt to bludgeon the audience, to bludgeon the actual play itself

and then the one-liners arrive because there is no resonance; there is no networking; there aren't any veins leading in and out from the kernel, the heart - the heart as the core of the play and all the themes, the veins, bringing life and giving life

the play different to stories and to poems, and to painting, sculpture - closer to a piece of music composed for different instruments

where the conductor uses a guitar instead of a clavichord, and dispenses with the composer's timing altogether

no resonance, such that the actors become strident and over emphatic generally trying to give significance in that bald way; and the director will have been doing the same earlier, the cohesion now gone, every man and woman for his/her self

that method of seeing dialogue in the 'english' tradition, as something disassociated from the individual beings who are actually involved in the speaking